

Education is key to better future, says Rosmah
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KUALA LUMPUR - The Prime Minister's wife Rosmah Mansor said Tuesday that education, particularly at an early stage, is the most important tool to nurture children into responsible leaders and good citizens and shape the future for a better world.

Rosmah said that education would give children the capacity, capability and value system to be good leaders, as well as the social mobility to uplift themselves.

In her keynote address at the inaugural First Ladies Summit at the Palace of the Golden Horses near here, Rosmah said that children should be taught not only to strive for economic and technological advancement but also to foster and cultivate harmonious societies which care for the people.

Fifteen first ladies are attending the summit themed, "A Child Today, A Leader Tomorrow". Also attending are six representatives of first ladies and 20 ministers.

"I have faith that education that begins early in the life of a child, through career and lifelong learning, is not only the keystone to knowledgeable and creative adults, but also fundamental to the inculcation of values, ethics and roles, which ultimately shape the nation's character, growth and social cohesion," she told a packed ballroom.

Rosmah pointed out that history had shown that countries that neglected education, particularly early education, would eventually realise that they would lose out and struggle to move their economies forward and create progress in their societies.

Rosmah also said that as investing in children helped to lay the much needed foundation for nation building and global peace, education must not only transmit knowledge that was developed in the past but also anticipate future knowledge, skills and behaviours needed by youth when they assume adult roles.

"Education as well as social environments of the family and community are the major influences in empowering and enriching children with the necessary knowledge, positive values and skills towards these goals," she stressed.

Rosmah said that given the large proportion of young people, especially in the developing world, if they were sufficiently educated and prepared for the future, they formed a significant demographic that could drive economic growth and contribute to global welfare.

"If not they could be marginalised and radicalised, thus becoming easy recruits for subversive elements that can lead to domestic and international insecurity and instability. They may also stray and be lured into lives of vice and crime," said Rosmah.

Saying that Early Childhood Education and Care or ECEC was a subject close to her heart, Rosmah said that it gave children below the age of four from underprivileged families an early start in life.

Beginning with five pilot centres in 2007, the ECEC is now implemented in 500 centres nationwide which benefits more than 20,000 children who are from rural areas and from among the urban poor.

She also told the audience that the building of schools for gifted children between the ages of 15 to 17 years, which is directly attached to the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), was underway and that the first intake of about 150 academically gifted children would commence in January next year.

In her speech, Rosmah also stressed that the community and the state had an equally important role in nurturing children to be good leaders, and as such they should design policies that could stimulate intellectual, cultural and spiritual development among children.

Rosmah also said that the world faced "many intractable problems" such as poverty and malnutrition, gender inequality, environmental degradation, weak governance systems, economic crisis, armed conflicts, security threats and societal failures, all of which were still plaguing humankind.

"If we look around us today, we see a world with so many conflicts and so many problems, almost all of which are caused by mankind. Who are these people? Weren't all these people once (were) children? What happened in their lives that made them do these harmful acts with neither mercy nor remorse?" she asked.

"More than half of the world's population, mainly in developing countries, live in abject poverty, without clean water, proper sanitation and enough food to eat.

"The poor include refugees fleeing conflict situations and more than one billion children, who are the most visible victims of malnutrition," Rosmah said.

Citing Unicef's "The State of the World's Children" Report 2009, Rosmah said 24,000 children died each day due to poverty and 121 million children worldwide had no access to education and nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or even sign their names.

"If only less than one per cent of what the world spent every year on weapons was used to put every child into school, we could have eliminated illiteracy.

"Yet this simple logic seemed to have escaped the attention of the movers and shakers of the world, and illiteracy continues to be a serious problem," she said.

Recalling Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's address at the United Nations General Assembly last month where he called for a Global Movement of the Moderates to reclaim the agenda for peace and pragmatism, Rosmah said, that generation of leaders must be nurtured from today.

"Indeed the creation of sustainable global movement of the moderates must, to a large extent incorporate the creation of an entire new generation of leaders with the right world view and correct set of values.

"Only then can we hope to foster a generation of peace loving, rational thinking individuals of various capabilities to take leadership roles in all fields and spheres, be it in politics, business, civil society, the sciences or the arts," she said.

Describing the First Ladies, who are the wives of the heads of governments, as the most influential maternal voice of every nation, Rosmah said that they were in the position to make significant advances in the cause of children, and consequently in shaping future

societies. - Bernama

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